



National Transportation Safety Board Aviation Accident Final Report

Location:	PORT ISABEL, TX	Accident Number:	FTW96LA344
Date & Time:	08/13/1996, 1822 CDT	Registration:	N6316T
Aircraft:	Cessna TR182	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Defining Event:		Injuries:	2 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General Aviation - Personal		

Analysis

The airplane was observed to pass from north to south under the Queen Isabel Causeway Bridge, which spanned between Port Isabel & South Padre Island, TX. After a 180 degree turn, it approached the bridge from south for another pass. However, during this pass, it struck a concrete bridge pylon & column, then descended uncontrolled into the water. No preimpact mechanical problem was found. The airplane's last annual inspection was dated 7/27/95. Neither of the pilot-rated occupants held a valid FAA medical certificate. Toxicology testing of the right seat occupant's blood revealed 0.006 mcg/ml tetrahydrocannabinol (active substance in marijuana), 0.006 mcg/ml tetrahydrocannabinol carboxylic acid (inactive metabolite of the active substance in marijuana), 0.087 mcg/ml cocaine, 1.809 mcg/ml benzoylecgonine (inactive metabolite of cocaine), and 0.095 mcg/ml diphenhydramine (a sedating over-the-counter antihistamine). Toxicology testing of the left seat occupant revealed cocaethylene (a substance formed when cocaine and alcohol are ingested at around the same time) in the liver fluid; 65 mg/dl ethanol in the vitreous fluid; and 143 mg/dl ethanol, 0.133 mcg/ml cocaine, and 0.066 mcg/ml benzoylecgonine in the blood.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: pilot impairment of judgment and performance due to alcohol and drugs, and failure of the pilot(s) to maintain obstacle clearance, during an intentional low altitude flight maneuver (low pass under a bridge).

Findings

Occurrence #1: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH OBJECT

Phase of Operation: MANEUVERING

Findings

1. (C) JUDGMENT - POOR - PILOT IN COMMAND
2. (C) IMPAIRMENT(DRUGS) - PILOT IN COMMAND
3. (C) IMPAIRMENT(ALCOHOL) - PILOT IN COMMAND
4. (C) LOW ALTITUDE FLIGHT/MANEUVER - INTENTIONAL - PILOT IN COMMAND
5. OBJECT - BRIDGE/OVERPASS
6. (C) CLEARANCE - NOT MAINTAINED - PILOT IN COMMAND

Occurrence #2: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH TERRAIN/WATER

Phase of Operation: DESCENT - UNCONTROLLED

Findings

7. TERRAIN CONDITION - WATER

Factual Information

On August 13, 1996, at 1822 central daylight time, a Cessna TR182, N6316T, registered to and operated by a private owner as a Title 14 CFR Part 91 personal flight collided with a causeway bridge while maneuvering near Port Isabel, Texas. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed for the cross country flight and a flight plan was not filed. The private pilot and the pilot rated passenger received fatal injuries and the airplane was destroyed. The flight originated from McAllen, Texas, at 1730.

A review of the McAllen Air Traffic Control Tower and Corpus Christi Approach Control data, by the investigator-in-charge, revealed that the airplane departed the Miller International Airport and requested vectors by approach control to the Cameron County Airport for touch and goes. At about 1753, the pilot reported that he had the airport in sight. Approach control service was terminated and the pilot was given a frequency of 119.5 if he wanted further ATC service. The last communication from the pilot was about 1755 when he requested and received from approach control the Unicom frequency for the Cameron County Airport.

During telephone interviews, conducted by the investigator-in-charge, and on the enclosed statements, witnesses and local authorities reported that the airplane was observed flying a pass from north to south under the Queen Isabel Causeway Bridge which spans between Port Isabel, Texas, and South Padre Island, Texas. The airplane made a 180 degree turn and approached the bridge toward the north for another pass; however, the airplane struck a concrete bridge pylon and column and descended uncontrolled into the water. Witnesses recalled an explosion and black smoke as the airplane struck the bridge. Portions of the vertical and horizontal stabilizer were found projecting from the bridge column at about 8 feet above the waterline. Texas Department of Public Safety divers located the fuselage submerged on the west side of the column in approximately 8 to 10 feet of water. See the enclosed reports from the Texas Department of Transportation, Texas Department of Public Safety, and the U. S. Coast Guard for additional details.

The FAA records for the pilot-in-command and the pilot rated passenger, reviewed by the investigator-in-charge, revealed the following information. The pilot-in-command obtained the Private Pilot Certificate on April 4, 1988. The last third class medical certificate was issued on August 25, 1988, at which time the pilot reported a total of 600 flight hours. The pilot rated passenger obtained the Private Pilot Certificate on June 18, 1984, with his last third class medical certificate issued on May 30, 1986. Total flight time listed on his medical application was 2,700 hours.

The FAA aircraft registration records revealed that the airplane was registered to the pilot-in-command on December 10, 1985. A review of the aircraft maintenance records, by the investigator-in-charge, revealed that the last annual inspection was performed and the airplane returned to service on July 27, 1995.

The autopsy for the pilot-in-command was performed by Lawrence J. Dahm, M.D., at Harlingen, Texas, with autopsy toxicology screening performed by Dean F. Fritch, Forensic Toxicologist, at the National Medical Services, Inc., at Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. Aviation Toxicological testing was performed by the FAA Civil Aeromedical Institute (CAMI) at Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The CAMI toxicological findings were confirmed positive for alcohol in the following concentrations: 143.000 mg/dL in the blood; 166.000 mg/dL in muscle fluid; and 65.000 mg/dL in vitreous fluid. The CAMI toxicology findings were

confirmed positive for cocaine in the following concentrations: 0.133 ug/ml in the blood; and 0.114 ug/ml in liver fluid. See the enclosed toxicology report for additional alcohol and drug concentrations. The South Padre Island Police Department reported public intoxication convictions against the pilot-in-command and other criminal and traffic charges pending.

The autopsy for the pilot rated passenger was performed by Margie W. Cornwell, MD, of Harlingen, Texas. Aviation Toxicological testing was performed by the FAA Civil Aeromedical Institute (CAMI) at Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The CAMI toxicological findings were confirmed positive for marihuana and cocaine in the following concentrations: 0.006 ug/ml tetrahydrocannabinol in the blood; 0.006 ug/ml tetrahydrocannabinol carboxylic acid (marihuana) in the blood; 0.162 ug/ml tetrahydrocannabinol carboxylic acid in the urine; 0.087 ug/ml cocaine in the blood; 1.809 ug/ml benzoylecgonine in the blood; 16.203 ug/ml cocaine in the urine; and 277.950 ug/ml benzoylecgonine in the urine. See the enclosed toxicology report for additional drug concentrations.

The Board neither took possession of the airplane nor examined any airplane components during the investigation.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Private	Age:	36, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine Land	Seat Occupied:	Left
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	None	Restraint Used:	
Instrument Rating(s):	None	Second Pilot Present:	No
Instructor Rating(s):	None	Toxicology Performed:	Yes
Medical Certification:	Class 3 Expired	Last FAA Medical Exam:	08/25/1988
Occupational Pilot:		Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:	600 hours (Total, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Cessna	Registration:	N6316T
Model/Series:	TR182 TR182	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	No
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	R18201974
Landing Gear Type:	Retractable - Tricycle	Seats:	4
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	01/27/1995, Annual	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	3300 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:		Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:		Engine Manufacturer:	Lycoming
ELT:	Installed	Engine Model/Series:	O-540-L3C5D
Registered Owner:	RICHARD C. HARRISS	Rated Power:	235 hp
Operator:	RICHARD C. HARRISS	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual Conditions	Condition of Light:	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	BRO, 23 ft msl	Distance from Accident Site:	15 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	1856 CST	Direction from Accident Site:	177°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear / 0 ft agl	Visibility	10 Miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None / 0 ft agl	Visibility (RVR):	0 ft
Wind Speed/Gusts:	16 knots /	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:	160°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:	29 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	33° C / 22° C
Precipitation and Obscuration:			
Departure Point:	MCALLEN, TX (MFE)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:	, TX (T31)	Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	1730 CST	Type of Airspace:	Class G

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Fatal	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Passenger Injuries:	1 Fatal	Aircraft Fire:	On-Ground
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	On-Ground
Total Injuries:	2 Fatal	Latitude, Longitude:	

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	JOYCE M SMITH	Report Date:	04/15/1998
Additional Participating Persons:	RAMON BARRERA; SAN ANTONIO, TX		
Publish Date:			
Investigation Docket:	NTSB accident and incident dockets serve as permanent archival information for the NTSB's investigations. Dockets released prior to June 1, 2009 are publicly available from the NTSB's Record Management Division at pubinq@ntsb.gov , or at 800-877-6799. Dockets released after this date are available at http://dms.nts.gov/pubdms/ .		

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), established in 1967, is an independent federal agency mandated by Congress through the Independent Safety Board Act of 1974 to investigate transportation accidents, determine the probable causes of the accidents, issue safety recommendations, study transportation safety issues, and evaluate the safety effectiveness of government agencies involved in transportation. The NTSB makes public its actions and decisions through accident reports, safety studies, special investigation reports, safety recommendations, and statistical reviews.

The Independent Safety Board Act, as codified at 49 U.S.C. Section 1154(b), precludes the admission into evidence or use of any part of an NTSB report related to an incident or accident in a civil action for damages resulting from a matter mentioned in the report. A factual report that may be admissible under 49 U.S.C. § 1154(b) is available [here](#).